

6/21/22 Tuesday

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US Treasury's Yellen Says Inflation Causes 'Global, Not Local,' US Not Destined for Recession

As the value of the US dollar continues to decline alongside unemployment, many economic observers have fretted that a wage-price spiral is all but inevitable, which would strangle economic growth as in-demand workers demand higher wages to compensate for higher prices, driving prices still higher.

Speaking to reporter George Stephanopoulos on [ABC's "The Week" on Sunday](#), US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said inflation "is unacceptably high," but that a recession is not "at all inevitable" as the administration struggles to respond to it.

"I expect the economy to slow," Yellen said. "It's been growing at a very rapid rate, as the economy, as the labor market, has recovered and we have reached full employment. It's natural now that we expect a transition to steady and stable growth, but I don't think a recession is at all inevitable."

The Treasury chief, who is a former chairperson of the US' central bank, the Federal Reserve, said that it was the "top priority" of US President Joe Biden and the Fed's present chairperson, Jerome Powell, to bring down inflation, which has continued to increase past its 40-year high earlier this year. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' May report on consumer prices found an 8.6% average increase over the previous year, or 6%, if energy and food costs are removed, a metric called "core inflation."

Stephanopoulos pressed Yellen on the numbers, asking, "You say that inflation is a global problem, and it certainly is, but how do you explain the fact that Europe's core inflation last month was under 4% and the U.S. was at 6%?"

"So, energy prices spillover is really half of inflation, food and energy and the spillover is because energy is an important input into almost everything into the economy," the Treasury chief replied. "It is true that we've had core inflation over and above that, that is too high and the [Federal Reserve] will take steps to bring it down. President Biden believes there are other things the administration can do to support what the Fed will do."

Last week, the Fed Board of Governors [increased interest rates](#) by 75 base points - their biggest hike in nearly 30 years - on the heels of the BLS report. That followed a 50-base-point increase the month prior, which had little effect. However, [many on Wall Street expect](#) the Fed's actions to not just blunt inflation, but to trigger a recession. Even Powell has referred to the central bank's goal as a ["soft or soft-ish landing."](#) admitting the difficulty of blunting inflation without also blunting economic growth.

"You say it's not inevitable, but I guess the question is: Is it likely?" Stephanopoulos pressed Yellen on Sunday.

She asserted that "consumer spending remains very strong," although acknowledging that in reality, [consumer spending has decreased](#). Yellen also said that "bank balances are high" and "the labor market is very strong, arguably the strongest of the post-war period."

Yellen repeated Biden's [excuse for high inflation](#): oil prices have increased, driven largely by Russia's special operation in Ukraine that began in February 2022 - the so-called "Putin price hike." However, inflation was already a problem [economists were worried about](#) in the fall of 2021, and it isn't so much Russia's operation to neutralize Ukraine as a NATO springboard that's driving up oil prices as it is Biden's total boycott of imports of Russian oil and gas and the European Union's attempts to follow suit. Moscow's fossil fuel sales income [has doubled since February](#) and its oil exports increased by 12% in the first five months of 2022, Russian Deputy Prime Minister [Alexander Novak said on Friday](#).

In addition, US lawmakers have pointed to oil and gas companies gouging prices amid the shortages as a major problem, with the US House of Representatives [passing a bill last month](#) to crack down on the practice. However, that, too, is not a new issue, as [economists last year noted](#) price gouging by retailers was a big part of increasing prices on other goods amid shortages and delays created by a variety of pandemic lockdown-related factors, including Covid outbreaks in China.

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Is China Losing or Gaining Against the US in Competition to Woo Bangkok? Media Can't Decide

Competing narratives have emerged in the English-language media about Thailand's political allegiance amid the rapidly emerging cold war between the United States and China. Whether China is gaining or losing ground, both sides see it as indicative of Beijing's supposedly "transactional" diplomacy.

"China losing, US gaining crucial ground in Thailand: Thai-China relations are in quiet but certain decline while US reaffirms its strategic and economic commitment to the kingdom," a [June 9 article in Asia Times](#) triumphantly declared.

The article, which relies on "multiple Thai officials" cited anonymously, asserts that "as Beijing transitions from less soft and more hard diplomacy under ambassador Han, the Thais are overtly looking back to the US – and its regional ally Japan – for new diplomatic balance and choice."

It casts China as a preying would-be colonial power, tapping into the common Western trope that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure megaproject is nothing more than a tool for Beijing to get new leverage over other nations, and asserts that China has resorted to bullying Bangkok because it won't finish a [rail line connecting the Thai capital](#) with Vientiane, Laos' capital city that sits on the Thai border.

"I think they have that [encirclement] sense, but whether or not they fully appreciate that circumstance and it's widely shared in the entire establishment, [I'm] not sure," an unnamed Bangkok-based senior diplomat told Asia Times. "[But] when you look at it geographically, it looks like an encirclement and Thailand is the odd one out."

The diplomat referred to Thailand as a "democratic oasis," which contrasts sharply with the article's framing of China's friendship with Thailand only blossoming after the 2014 coup that the

article's author described as "a lurch from democracy that sent relations with long-time ally the United States into a tailspin."

Aside from the snail-like pace at which China's much-desired rail line is proceeding, the article's only proof of its claims is that Thailand's exports to the US grew during the COVID-19 pandemic while its exports to China diminished, driving up its [trade deficit with Beijing](#); that Bangkok and Washington [recently signed military deals](#); and Bangkok being a founding member of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), a [rival economic bloc](#) set up by Washington last month that excludes China but includes many of the surrounding nations.

Not mentioned in the article is that Thailand was also one of the first to ratify the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RECP), the world's largest trade bloc incorporating almost all of East Asia and excluding the United States, [which is hostile to the deal](#).

All of that contrasts very sharply with another article published 10 days later in Foreign Policy magazine, a Washington, DC, publication with major gravitas in American foreign policy spheres.

"Washington Worries China Is Winning Over Thailand: One of the United States' oldest security partners in Asia is increasingly marching to Beijing's music," [Foreign Policy opined on June 17](#). According to this article, the US and its allies lost the initiative to Beijing after the military coups in Bangkok in 2006 and especially in 2014. While the Americans supposedly balked at the prospect of military cooperation with a non-democratic government, the unscrupulous Chinese swept in, promising the world to Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha. Now, eight years later, China has sunk its claws into Thailand just like it supposedly did to the Philippines - ignoring of course that [Manila doubled down](#) on its [alliance with Washington](#) well before then-President Rodrigo Duterte left office.

"The recipe is there; all of the ingredients are there," Lyle Morris, a senior policy analyst at the Rand Corporation and a former Pentagon official, told FP. "They've already invested in a lot of the defense industrial base with the subs and more arms being sold from China to Thailand. That's how it starts: It's building the relationships of the defense industrial base and having systems that are more amenable to China than to the US. I don't think Thailand is lost yet, but they definitely need some love."

Chief among FP's concerns is Thailand's [\\$400 million deal to buy submarines](#) from China, which European Union sanctions have ground to a halt after the German engine-maker canceled plans to supply the boats with propulsion. Although, according to an academic at the Heritage Foundation who spoke with the magazine, Beijing doesn't really care about the sub deal since the BRI agreement is the real prize - again because it supposedly gives Beijing leverage over Thai affairs. This contradicts other points also made in the article about how China is using the sub deal and others as leverage.

In 2017 and 2018, the White House and Pentagon [outlined in key policy documents](#) the US' strategic shift away from the War on Terror and toward what they called "great power competition" with Russia and China, with subsequent documents making clear that China is the main adversary. These nations, the US alleges, are "malign actors" with plans to destroy the "rules-based international order," a fanciful name for the US-led world order that emerged after World War 2 and solidified at the end of the Cold War.

According to Western leaders and media, whenever China or Russia, or other nations like Iran or Venezuela engage in any action around the globe that Washington can't dominate or stop, it's

done surreptitiously and necessarily undermines the US-led order. In China's relations with Southeast Asia and its regional bloc, ASEAN, this characterization is out in full-force, especially with respect to the South China Sea and the longstanding [dispute between six nations](#) over who controls which island chains in the waterway.

For years, the US has fretted that Beijing was trying to bribe its way into getting what it wants from ASEAN nations, particularly by signing BRI development deals and using bluster to get what it can't get in other ways. In response, Washington has [tried to push one arms sale](#) after another [on ASEAN nations](#), including drones, fighter aircraft, and other systems, and more recently with COVID-19 vaccines. However, at the top of China's agenda has been finishing a code of conduct for the South China Sea in cooperation with ASEAN.

After a dispute with Manila last spring, the two nations [pledged to push forward on the draft](#) code of conduct, and American academics have openly worried that if allowed to play out fairly, the code of conduct drafting will produce a document more amenable to Chinese interests than American ones. One paper from the DC think tank Center on Foreign Relations ([CFR](#)) [proposed that Washington foul](#) the China-ASEAN negotiations, draw up a separate code of conduct with ASEAN nations amenable to its interests, and impose it on China.

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Promises, Promises - Cartoons

By - Ted Rall

Over the holiday weekend, US President Joe Biden was spotted taking a tumble off his bicycle after going out riding in his home state of Delaware. Although the commander-in-chief indicated he was "fine" after the ordeal, the fall opened the floodgates for jokes - including from the former head of state.

Former US President Donald Trump took one of the easiest jabs of his life on Saturday when he opted to toss out a couple of jokes about his successor's weekend setback, promising a crowd in Tennessee he would never ride a bike.

Appearing before eventgoers at the American Freedom Tour event in Memphis, Tennessee, on Saturday, Trump began by showing concern for the fallen president before making light of the situation, drawing laughs from the crowd.

"I hope [Biden] has recovered, because as you know, he fell off his bicycle," Trump told the boisterous crowd. "No, I'm serious. I hope he's okay. Fell off a bicycle. I make this pledge to you today - I will never, ever ride a bicycle."

Adding insult to injury, an edited video of Biden's fall has been making the rounds on social media - including on Trump's Truth Social platform - that showed Trump knocking Biden from his bicycle with a golf club.

Reports at the time detailed that Biden's plummet to the cement ground was caused by his foot getting stuck in a toe clip after he'd come to a full stop near a gaggle of journalists.

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Fitness App Strikes Again as Platform is Used to Track Israeli Soldiers, Secret Military Bases

The San Francisco-based Strava company is used by more than 95 million people across 195 countries. The tracking app allows users to upload their running or cycling routes and compare respective performances to other users.

Unidentified users have been using the Strava fitness app to keep track of movements made by Israeli soldiers stationed on secretive military bases, an Israeli watchdog has revealed.

Disinformation watchdog FakeReporter detailed in its findings that fake users had uploaded false running "segments" from military installations onto the tech platform, allowing verified users to then work off the falsified running route and add their own progress to further complete a so-called 'map.'

Strava's tracking tools are effectively designed to allow any user to tack on their own map "segments" to either complete or design their running course on any previously uploaded route. However, Strava's flaw is that the app has no way of being able to tell whether the map uploads are legitimate.

Achiya Schatz, executive director for FakeReporter, told the Jerusalem Post that despite past security updates to the app, the flaw remained. At least 100 Israeli individuals who exercised across six military bases appeared to be affected by the security snag, even though their accounts had been private.

Officials determined that in order for users to be completely barred from prying eyes, they needed to set their profiles so they're only visible to their followers, as well as ensure that each running course is set to private.

"By exploiting the capability to upload engineered files, revealing the details of users anywhere in the world, hostile elements have taken one alarming step closer to exploiting a popular app in order to harm the security of citizens and countries alike," Schatz said.

After informing the Israeli military of the tech issue, FakeReporter notified representatives at Strava, who then took 'necessary steps' to rectify the matter.

Incidentally, this latest snag comes years after Strava was at the center of a similar controversy in 2018, when it was discovered that maps on the app publicized the location and layout of various military bases in Afghanistan, Nevada and the Falkland Islands.

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Video: Three Hospitalized After Plane's Landing Gear Collapses on Florida Runway, Catches Fire

Established in 1928, the Miami International Airport serves as a major transfer point for international passengers, operating upwards of 1,000 flights daily. Over 80 airlines service the airport.

Three individuals aboard a Red Air flight were hospitalized Tuesday afternoon after the commercial plane's landing gear collapsed and caught fire upon landing at Florida's Miami International Airport.

Greg Chin, a spokesperson for the airport, told CNN that 126 people were aboard the plane when disaster struck, noting that the three travelers transported to a local hospital had sustained minor injuries.

The flight was arriving from Las Americas International Airport in the Dominican Republic. Video of the incident shared online captured a fiery blaze on the tarmac as smoke is seen billowing into the air.

The fire has since been extinguished, with first responders working to mitigate fuel spillage, the Miami-Dade Fire Rescue team detailed in a social media post.

A [subsequent statement](#) issued by Miami International Airport revealed that the collapsed landing gear on the nose of the plane was what ultimately ignited the blaze.

Officials have temporarily shuttered nearby runways as their investigation is ongoing.

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Amber Heard Plans to Write 'Tell-All' Book After Leaving Hollywood

By - Mary Manley

Johnny Depp was awarded \$10.35 million in damages following a lengthy and highly-publicized court case in which he sued his ex-wife, Amber Heard, for defamation. The lawsuit mainly focused on a 2018 Washington Post op-ed the 36 year-old actress had written in which she painted herself as a victim of domestic violence.

The “Aquaman” actress is apparently drafting a “tell-all book” after being found [guilty](#) of defaming her ex-husband Depp, 59, on three counts, essentially directing Heard to cough up \$10.35 million in damages to the man she allegedly abused.

“Amber considers her career in Hollywood over. She’s already in talks and is excited about it,” said an inside [source](#). “At this point, she has nothing to lose and wants to tell all.”

The “tell-all book” will be closely watched by Depp and his lawyers and could subject Heard to more lawsuits in the future. Heard’s op-ed for the Washington Post—despite not mentioning Depp by name—is what landed her in a Fairfax, Virginia court in the first place.

“Depp and his attorneys will be reading and listening to everything that Heard states,” said Dror [Bikel](#), who is a trial lawyer and author. “If she crosses the line, which is likely, there is no question that will be hit with another defamation suit and end up right back in court.”

Heard and her team of lawyers plan to appeal the June 1 verdict in an attempt to mitigate the actress’s debt of \$8.35 million (since she was awarded \$2 million for one of her own countersuits), which Heard’s lawyer Elaine [Bredehoft](#) has said the star is unable to pay.

Bredehoft also mentioned in court that Heard has an additional debt of \$6 million in legal fees. The jury decided that Heard was defamed when Depp’s lawyer, Adam Waldman, made a claim that Heard and her friends staged a scene and conspired to tell a false story in order to frame Depp. “Quite simply this was an ambush, a hoax,” [Waldman](#) told the Daily Mail in 2020.

“They set Mr. Depp up by calling the cops, but the first attempt didn’t do the trick. The officers came to the penthouses, thoroughly searched and interviewed, and left after seeing no damage to face or property.”

“So Amber and her friends spilled a little wine and roughed the place up, got their stories straight under the direction of a lawyer and publicist, and then placed a second call to 911,” stated Waldman, which won Heard \$2 million in the lawsuit despite conflicting witness testimonies regarding the incident.

It’s unclear what Heard is hoping to achieve in writing a “tell-all” book after already losing millions in a drawn-out court battle. The book would most certainly be a gamble as it echoes the same actions the actress took in [2018](#) when she wrote her op-ed, in which she said, “I spoke up against sexual violence — and faced our culture’s wrath. That has to change.”

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Alaska is the Most Patriotic State of All US, Study Finds
By - Mary Manley

The study came to its conclusion by focusing on the military and civic engagement of each state, ultimately opting for putting more of an emphasis on civic commitments such as volunteerism and participating in voting.

Alaska has been dubbed the most patriotic state of all the 50 US states, a study conducted by personal finance website WalletHub has revealed. The second and third-ranked states were listed as Montana and Virginia, respectively.

The study, which was published on Monday and conducted by personal finance website WalletHub, further determined that Arkansas, a southern Republican-leaning state which borders the Mississippi River, was found to be the least patriotic state.

The ideology behind American patriotism is complex. So, how does one measure a complex ideology, exactly? According to [Statista](#), which did a study on patriotism in the United States last year, patriotism is defined as having pride in and devotion to one’s homeland. But because the United States is: 1) massive and 2) a cultural melting pot, it’s difficult to pinpoint the exact characteristics of a “patriot” in the U-S-of-A.

In order to conduct their findings, [WalletHub](#) measured patriotism in the United States based on the following factors: military engagement and civic engagement.

The study put more emphasis on the importance of civic engagement over military engagement, weighing this factor with 75/100 points for each state. According to the researchers, civic engagement includes: adults who voted in the 2020 presidential election, adults who voted in the 2020 primary elections, states that require US History and Civics classes, “residents who participate in groups or organizations,” jury participation, and volunteerism.

The states that scored the highest for volunteerism were (in order starting with the highest ranked): Utah, South Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado and Minnesota. Those with the lowest volunteerism rating were: New York, Nevada, Florida, Mississippi and Kentucky.

The states with the highest percentage of adults who voted in the 2020 presidential election were New Jersey, Minnesota, Oregon, New Hampshire and Wisconsin (tied with Maryland). The states with the lowest percentage of voters in that same election were Arkansas, West Virginia, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Alabama.

For military engagement, which the study ranked with 25/100 points, the researchers used these factors to measure a state's patriotism: military enlistees, veterans, active-duty soldiers, and civilian adult population in military reserves.

States that had the highest number of military enlistees included: Georgia, Alaska, Texas, South Carolina and Alabama. Those with the lowest number of military enlistees include: North Dakota, Vermont, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Minnesota.

And the states with the most veterans per capita, according to the study, are: Alaska, Virginia, Wyoming, Montana and Hawaii. Those with the least amount of veterans include: New York, New Jersey, California, Massachusetts and Utah.

The top ten most patriotic states in the nation are: Alaska, Montana, Virginia, North Dakota, Oregon, Maryland, Hawaii, Vermont, New Hampshire and Iowa.

The least patriotic states according to the study are: Arkansas, New York, Rhode Island, Florida, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Indiana, Alabama, Pennsylvania and Louisiana.

Overall, Democratic-leaning states tended to score higher on the "patriotic" measures than Republican-leaning states, the study found.

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What's Inside? US Senate Group Reveals 80-Page Bipartisan Gun Safety Bill

By - Mary Manley

The bill will include money for school safety, mental health, state crisis intervention programs and incentives for states to report juvenile records to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), as well as potentially close the so-called 'boyfriend loophole.'

A group of bipartisan US senators were finally able to reach a decision late Tuesday on a new gun safety bill, which comes on the heels of the Robb Elementary School shooting. The Texas massacre is considered the deadliest shooting ever at a public school in the Lone Star State, and the third deadliest school shooting in the US ever.

Just ten days before an 18 year-old boy with legally-purchased weapons shot children at a school in [Texas](#), another 18 year old targeted Black shoppers at Tops grocery store in [Buffalo](#), New York.

The angry, young American male has made his violent rounds for over two decades since one of the most shocking school shootings in 1999: the Columbine High School shooting in which an 18 year-old boy and 17 year-old boy killed 13 and wounded 20 others at their high school despite various red flags leading up to the event.

As the New York Post's Maureen [Callahan](#) puts it, mass shootings committed by angry, misogynistic young men are no longer a rare tragedy but a feature of the US.

An 80-page bipartisan gun safety bill may finally tackle America's cancer. Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT) led weeks of negotiations for democrats while Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) led negotiations for Republicans. The bill may become the first gun control measure to pass Congress in 30 years, and has been referred to by Murphy as a "breakthrough" on gun violence.

The measure was advanced in the Senate chamber with a 64-34 vote, with 14 Republican lawmakers crossing the aisle. Should the vote tally maintain, it will break the 60-vote filibuster. A final vote may be held on Thursday.

But what do some of these breakthrough features include?

Reviews Gun Buyers Aged 18 to 21:

Both the Uvalde and Buffalo shooters were only 18 when they legally purchased their guns and committed mass murder. The proposed bill would enhance background checks on those aged 18 to 21 by requiring (NICS) to disqualify individuals with juvenile records from being able to purchase guns. It would also keep in place the current law of requiring a three-day background check investigation on 18 to 21 year-olds who wish to buy firearms.

Closing The 'Boyfriend Loophole':

The 'boyfriend loophole' is one of the more dizzying gun laws in which a domestic abuser who is just a 'boyfriend' is still allowed to purchase a firearm despite a history of violence against their romantic partner. Those who physically abused their spouse, a person whom they share a child with or live with, are not allowed to own guns, but politicians in the US didn't see violent boyfriends or girlfriends as an issue, apparently.

The new bill would disallow anyone from purchasing a gun if they had been convicted of a domestic violence crime against an individual they have a "continuing serious relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with," thereby closing the boyfriend loophole.

If the abuser hasn't committed other crimes after five years they are then allowed to purchase a gun.

Funding for Preventative Programs & Other Interventions:

The bill would also include incentives for states to create 'red flag laws' that would allow law enforcement to remove firearms from an individual who is displaying threatening signs towards himself or those around him.

Before the [Uvalde](#) shooting, the 18 year-old gunman was threatening to "kidnap, rape or kill" women he spoke to online. Reports were ignored. The shooter in [Buffalo](#), New York, was active on (oftentimes racist) online chat groups on the Discord messaging platform. Law enforcement officials found a roughly 600-page chat log written by the alleged shooter in which he detailed plans for the shooting at Tops.

The legislation would also make it so mental health courts, drug courts, and veterans' courts, as well as assisted outpatient treatment courts will see more funding. The bill would also set up due process for intervention programs. However, Cornyn made it clear that if a state does not include due process protections, that state will not be eligible for funding.

Both [Senate](#) Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) praised the bill in a unifying moment across the aisle.

"This bipartisan gun-safety legislation is progress and will save lives. While it is not everything we want, this legislation is urgently needed," Schumer said.

"For years, the far left falsely claimed that Congress could only address the terrible issue of mass murders by trampling on law-abiding Americans' constitutional rights. This bill proves that

false. Our colleagues have put together a commonsense package of popular steps that will help make these horrifying incidents less likely while fully upholding the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens," said McConnell.

Activist group March for Our Lives, which works to end gun violence and was launched after the Parkland school shooting, praised the bill in a statement on [Tuesday](#) saying: "When this bill passes, it will be the first substantial piece of federal gun safety legislation to become law in our lifetime. That's worth celebrating."

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UN Secretary-General Condemns Deadly Attacks by Extremist Groups in Mali - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, June 22 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday condemned the attacks by extremist groups in Mali over the weekend that resulted in the death of at least 100 civilians, the United Nations said on Wednesday.

"The Secretary-General is shocked and outraged by reports that at least a 100 civilians have been killed in attacks reportedly perpetrated by extremist groups against several villages in the Bandiagara region, Central Mali, on 18 and 19 June," the United Nations said in a statement. Guterres also denounced other attacks by extremist groups in the region of Gao, including in Meneka, where many of the residents decided to leave out of fear for their safety.

In addition, Guterres called on the authorities in Mali to restore order and reiterated that the United Nations mission in the country would provide them with support.

"The Secretary-General calls on the Malian authorities to redouble their efforts to restore peace and stability to Mali and reiterates the readiness of the United Nations and its Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to support these efforts," the statement said.

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UN's Staff, Facilities in Afghanistan Unaffected by Deadly Earthquake - Coordinator

UNITED NATIONS, June 22 (Sputnik) - UN staff and facilities in Afghanistan have not been affected by the deadly earthquake that struck the country on Wednesday, UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Afghanistan Ramiz Alakbarov told Sputnik.

The latest data provided by the Paktika province suggests that more than 1,000 people were killed and over 1,500 others were injured in the magnitude 6.1 earthquake.

"Our buildings and employees have not been affected," he said.

In the morning, UN teams went to the scene, including non-governmental organizations.

According to Alakbarov, UN employees are already at the scene.

"In Paktika alone, there are 14 mobile teams that are providing medical care."

At least 9.8 tonnes of medicines and medical supplies have been allocated and distributed by the UN, the official said, adding that emergency medical kits have been delivered to nearby hospitals.

NGO partners have sent eight ambulances there. The number of those dead is being specified, now the rubble is being cleared, he added.

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US Must Turn Page on Old Playbook to Resist China's Non-Market Industrial Policies - Tai

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration is seeking to recalibrate US trade relations with China to more effectively counter its "non-market industrial policies," Trade Representative Katherine Tai said on Wednesday.

In a written testimony to the Senate, Tai said the United States pressed Beijing to "live up to its commitments under the 'Phase One Agreement,'" but several rounds of talks "made clear the limits of the PRC's interest in delivering fully on those obligations."

"That is why we need to turn the page on the old playbook. The PRC's non-market industrial policies unfairly target U.S. workers, businesses, and key sectors. We have to use all available tools, and develop new tools, to defend our economic interests and values," she continued.

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US Will 'Not Let Up' in USMCA Dairy Dispute With Canada - Trade Representative

OTTAWA, June 22 (Sputnik) – The United States will continue to press Canada to fulfill its commitments to American dairy farmers and producers under the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), Trade Representative Katherine Tai said on Wednesday.

"Finally, we continue to press Canada to fulfill its commitment to U.S. dairy farmers and producers, and recently initiated a second set of dispute settlement consultations over its tariff-rate quota restrictions. Canada's actions are preventing U.S. dairy producers from receiving the market access benefits promised in the USMCA and we will not let up," Tai said in written testimony to the Senate.

The Biden administration in May initiated a second dispute against Canada's dairy tariffs under USMCA, alleging that the restrictions violate the trade agreement.

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Biden Calls on Congress to Suspend Federal Gas Tax for 3 Months - White House

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden urged Congress on Wednesday to suspend the federal gas tax for three months.

"Today, he [Biden] is calling on Congress to suspend the federal gas tax for three months, through September, without taking any money away from the Highway Trust Fund. And he is calling on states to take similar action to provide some direct relief, whether suspending their own gas taxes or helping consumers in other ways," the White House said in a statement. The US leader is due to deliver speech on the matter later in the day.

"President Biden understands that high gas prices pose a significant challenge for working families. That's why he has taken action in recent months to boost the supply of oil and gas, including an historic release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, and encouraging oil companies and refiners to boost capacity and output to get more supply on the market," the statement added.

The Biden administration has said the impact of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine and alleged price gouging by energy firms are responsible for higher fuel prices. Biden has also partially blamed companies not refining enough oil for impacting supply.

However, Russia has denied the accusations, saying the sanctions imposed by the US and its allies, as well as Ukraine's mining the Black Sea, have upended the market and contributed to higher energy, food and fertilizer prices.

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UPDATE 3 - US Senate Moves Forward on Bipartisan Gun Control Bill, NRA Says Legislation Can Be Abused

(Adds NRA, lawmaker reactions in paras 7-12, changes throughout)

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - Top negotiators in the US Senate said they reached a deal on a bipartisan gun control bill that will tighten background checks and provide funding to address mental health issues, among other provisions.

After the deal was struck, the Senate was set to remove a procedural hurdle to advance the measure, with at least 63 senators voting in favor of beginning debate.

"[The] bipartisan legislation... will help keep our children and our communities safer," Senator John Cornyn, the lead Republican negotiator on the gun control bill, said during remarks on the Senate floor on Tuesday afternoon.

The senator also said they are not introducing a national red flag law, but are "providing the availability of law enforcement-related grants to crisis intervention programs whether you've adopted a red flag program or not."

Cornyn said the Bipartisan Safe Communities Act includes ideas from both Republicans and Democrats and has real potential to become law.

US Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat, said in later remarks that the bipartisan legislation would ensure domestic abusers cannot have guns, would provide enhanced background checks for

young buyers and ban straw purchases i.e. purchases via a proxy buyer who can pass a background check to buy the weapon.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said he supports the legislation, adding that this bill will help make mass shooting incidents less likely while fully upholding the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding US citizens.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said he will put this bill on Senate floor for a vote with an initial procedural vote possible as soon as Tuesday night, which will be followed by an effort to pass the legislation as quickly as possible.

Schumer added that this bill is not everything Democrats wanted but it will save lives.

The bill did receive some opposition from several lawmakers including one of the biggest US gun lobbyists, the National Rifle Association (NRA).

The National Rifle Association said the bill does very little to address gun violence while opening the door to unnecessary burdens on Americans' rights to own firearms.

"This legislation can be abused to restrict lawful gun purchases, infringe upon the rights of law-abiding Americans, & use fed dollars to fund gun control measures being adopted by state & local politicians," the NRA said.

Congresswoman Mary Miller said she opposed the proposed bill because she opposes all efforts to infringe on the Second Amendment rights of her constituents.

Republican Senator Marco Rubio appeared to oppose voting to begin debate on the bill as soon as Tuesday night, underscoring that the text of the legislation was only made available about an hour ago.

Discussions in Congress on gun-related violence and firearms laws increased significantly following a series of high-profile mass shootings in the United States.

The Second Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees the right of Americans to keep and bear arms.

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Biden to Deliver Remarks on Gas Prices on Wednesday Afternoon - White House

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Wednesday afternoon will deliver remarks about gas prices and inflation in the United States, the White House said in a press release.

"2:00 PM [18:00 GMT] The president delivers remarks on gas prices," the White House said in the release on Tuesday.

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Biden Administration Plans to Limit Nicotine Levels in Cigarettes - FDA

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's plans to set limits on the amount of nicotine in cigarettes to reduce the product's addictiveness, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) said in a press release.

"Today, the Biden-Harris Administration published plans for future potential regulatory actions that include the US Food and Drug Administration's plans to develop a proposed product standard that would establish a maximum nicotine level to reduce the addictiveness of cigarettes and certain other combusted tobacco products," the release said on Tuesday. FDA commissioner Robert M. Calvi in the release said lowering nicotine levels to "minimally addictive or non-addictive levels" would help current addicted smokers quit and decrease chances of addiction among future generations.

In a 2018 study the FDA projected that by 2100 a nicotine limit could reduce the smoking rate from 12.5% to 1.4 percent and save more than eight million lives, the release added.

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US Govt. Selects Design Concepts for Nuclear Fission Plant to Power Moon Base - NASA

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - NASA and the US Department of Energy have selected three designs to build a fission nuclear power plant for a permanent manned base on the Moon in the Artemis Program, the US space agency announced in a press release.

"NASA and the US Department of Energy are working together to advance space nuclear technologies," the release said on Tuesday. "The agencies have selected three design concept proposals for a fission surface power system design that could be ready to launch by the end of the decade for a demonstration on the Moon."

The three contracts will be awarded through the Energy Department's Idaho National Laboratory and are each worth \$5 million, the release said.

"The contracts fund the development of initial design concepts for a 40-kilowatt class fission power system planned to last at least ten years in the lunar environment," the release added.

The fission systems will be relatively small and lightweight compared to other power systems and ensure continuous power regardless of location, available sunlight, and other natural environmental conditions as well as serving as prototypes for later models to operate on long-duration missions on the Moon and Mars, according to the release.

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UPDATE 2 - US Senator Cornyn Says Lawmakers Reached Deal on Bipartisan Gun Control Legislation

(Updates with a statement in para 6)

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - US Senator John Cornyn said lawmakers have reached a deal on a bipartisan gun control bill that will soon be unveiled, and it will not contain a national red flag law.

"Very soon, we will see the text of bipartisan legislation that will help keep our children and our communities safer," Cornyn, the lead Republican negotiator on the gun control bill, said during remarks on the Senate floor on Tuesday afternoon.

The senator also said they are not introducing a national red flag law, but are "providing the availability of law enforcement-related grants to crisis intervention programs whether you've adopted a red flag program or not."

Cornyn said the bill includes ideas from both Republicans and Democrats and has real potential to become law.

US Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat, said in later remarks that the bipartisan legislation would ensure domestic abusers cannot have guns, would provide enhanced background checks for young buyers and ban straw purchases i.e. purchases via a proxy buyer who can pass a background check to buy the weapon.

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Number of Monkeypox Cases in Canada Approach 200 - Health Authority

OTTAWA, June 22 (Sputnik) - The number of active monkeypox cases in Canada reached 198 as the Quebec Health Authority reported an additional 30 infections since last Friday.

Canada's Chief Public Health Officer Theresa Tam updated the nationwide monkeypox cases on Friday to 168. A breakdown by province showed there were 141 cases in Quebec, 21 in Ontario, four in Alberta and two in British Columbia.

"As of June 20, 171 cases have been recorded in Quebec, and 5 895 doses of vaccine have been administered since May 27," the Quebec Health Authority said via Twitter on Tuesday. The number of cases provided by the Quebec health authorities has added to Canada's total that reached 198 confirmed cases of the virus as data remains unchanged for the provinces of British Columbia Alberta, and Ontario.

Monkeypox is a zoonotic disease transmitted from animals to humans and is endemic in some African countries. The pathogen comes from the same family of viruses that causes smallpox, which was eradicated in 1980.

Several doctors in the United States have publicly said the disease is easily identifiable and treatable and the population should not panic.

The first outbreak of monkeypox in non-endemic countries was reported in May.

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More Artemis Delays Loom as Moon Program Engineers Duck August Launch Pledge - NASA

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - Prospects for an August unmanned first test launch of the Artemis1 Space Launch System mega-rocket and its Orion spacecraft receded on Tuesday when top NASA officials backed away from any commitment in a discussion of their not quite complete countdown or wet dress rehearsal test the day before.

"I don't think we know yet about an August launch window," NASA Deputy Associate Administrator for Exploration Systems Development Tom Whitmeyer told a press conference on Tuesday. "We'll see where we're at [when the data from Monday's rehearsal is analyzed]." Whitmeyer said the objectives of the rehearsal, in which the core rocket booster and the upper stage spacecraft were both fully fueled, had been met, but not quite all the objectives had been fulfilled.

"The primary objectives were met [and] most of the secondary objectives were met. ... we are in the 90 percentile [of goals met] where we need to be in the whole [100%], he said.

Monday's test was halted at minus 29 seconds from what would have been a launch where it was originally intended to go down to only nine seconds before launch, Whitmeyer and other NASA officials said.

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US Senator Cornyn Says Lawmakers Reached Deal on Bipartisan Gun Control Legislation
(Updates with more details in para 5)

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - US Senator John Cornyn said lawmakers have reached a deal on a bipartisan gun control bill that will soon be unveiled, and it will not contain a national red flag law.

"Very soon, we will see the text of bipartisan legislation that will help keep our children and our communities safer," Cornyn, the lead Republican negotiator on the gun control bill, said during remarks on the Senate floor on Tuesday afternoon.

The senator also said they are not introducing a national red flag law, but are "providing the availability of law enforcement-related grants to crisis intervention programs whether you've adopted a red flag program or not."

Cornyn said the bill includes ideas from both Republicans and Democrats and has real potential to become law.

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Blinken, Israeli Counterpart Discuss Dissolution of Knesset - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed with Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid the dissolution of the Knesset and the continuing close bilateral coordination on regional issues, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with Israeli Foreign Minister and Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid regarding the dissolution of the Knesset," Price said in a press release on Tuesday. "Secretary Blinken underscored our respect for democratic processes and reiterated our unwavering commitment to the strong US-Israel strategic relationship."

Blinken emphasized the continuing close bilateral coordination on regional and global issues and added that President Joe Biden looks forward to his visit to Israel in July.

On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Lapid decided that a bill to dissolve the Knesset would be submitted next week for parliamentary approval. If approved, the rotation would be carried out in an "orderly manner," that is, during the transitional period, and Lapid will become the head of government.

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US Sentences Mexican Citizen to 4 Years for Working as Unregistered Foreign Agent- Reports
WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - The US authorities sentenced a Mexican national to four years in prison for working in the United States as an unregistered foreign agent for Russia, the Miami Herald reported.

Hector Cabrera Fuentes pleaded guilty in February to acting on behalf of the Russian government without notifying the US authorities. Cabrera admitted to acting under the direction of an individual he believed to be a Russian government official to surveil an FBI informant in Miami.

Cabrera, 37, was sentenced to four years and one day in prison on Tuesday as part of a plea deal. During the hearing, Cabrera apologized for his actions and said he has no interest in committing similar offenses in the future, the report said.

Cabrera worked as a prominent cardiac scientist in Mexico, having published more than 100 scientific articles in the field, the report said.

The target of Cabrera's surveillance is believed to have been providing intelligence to the FBI on Russian spying activities in South Florida. Carbera was directed by an unidentified Russian official to gather information about the target's car, license plate and parking location, the report added.

Cabrera told investigators that he had met with the Russian official several times in 2019 prior to the February 2020 surveillance. Cabrera was arrested by FBI agents at Miami International Airport days after he conducted the surveillance while preparing to return to Mexico, according to the report.

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US Senator Cornyn Says Lawmakers Reached Deal on Bipartisan Gun Control Legislation

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) - US Senator John Cornyn said lawmakers have reached a deal on a bipartisan gun control bill that will soon be unveiled, and it will not contain a national red flag law.

"Very soon, we will see the text of bipartisan legislation that will help keep our children and our communities safer," Cornyn, the lead Republican negotiator on the gun control bill, said during remarks on the Senate floor on Tuesday afternoon.

The senator also said they are not introducing a national red flag law, but are "providing the availability of law enforcement-related grants to crisis intervention programs whether you've adopted a red flag program or not."

Cornyn said the bill includes ideas from both Republicans and Democrats and has real potential to become law.

US Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat, also said the text of the bill will be out shortly but added that a few details are still being finalized.

Discussions in Congress on gun-related violence and firearms laws increased significantly following a series of high-profile mass shootings in the United States.

The Second Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees the right of Americans to keep and bear arms.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, June 22 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* The first foreign ship Azov Concord, under the flag of Malta, left the port of Mariupol using the humanitarian corridor organized by the Russian military, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Tuesday.

* The EU member states have reached a full consensus on granting Ukraine candidate status for membership in the bloc, French Secretary of State for European Affairs Clement Beaune said.

* EU Ambassador to Russia Markus Ederer said that he had met with the country's deputy foreign ministers Andrey Rudenko and Alexander Grushko to discuss the situation in Ukraine and the blockage of Kaliningrad.

US, UK MERCENARIES

* The United States has been in direct contact with Russian authorities about Americans captured in Ukraine, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Tuesday.

* The White House is aware of Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov's comments that the Geneva Conventions' protections do not apply to the two captured US citizens fighting in Ukraine, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said.

* London appealed to Moscow on the topic of the UK citizens, sentenced to death in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), sent an "arrogant" note, Russian Ambassador to London Andrey Kelin said.

FOOD CRISIS

* A meeting of delegations from Turkey, Russia, the UN and Ukraine on the "grain issue" will be held next week in Istanbul, A Haber broadcaster reported, citing sources in the Turkish presidential administration.

* World Bank Group President David Malpass said that he is worried about the impact the shortage of natural gas will have on fertilizer markets immediately and next year.

BLOCKADE OF KALININGRAD

* Russia has lodged a strong protest to EU Ambassador in Moscow Markus Ederer in connection with the extension of sanctions to cargo transit to the Kaliningrad region, the Russian foreign ministry said on Tuesday.

* The Russian authorities have managed to stop the activities of non-profit organizations in the country's northwest that received funding from the West, including attempts to create the so-called German autonomy in the Kaliningrad region, Russia Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev said.

* Russia will respond to Lithuania's decision to impose a "transport blockade" of the Kaliningrad region, and this will affect people living in the Baltic country, Patrushev said.

ENERGY MARKETS

* The record exports of Russian oil to China is an example of the two countries' growing collaboration regarding Ukraine, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Tuesday.

* The Indian government urged state-owned oil companies to buy "huge volumes" of crude oil from Russia at a discount price, while the West keeps tightening the screws on Moscow, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing sources.

* Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said that China was conducting oil and gas exploration in the undisputed territory in the East China Sea and the Japanese government's claims were unfounded.

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Biden Calls Chevron CEO 'Sensitive' After Executive Urges Him to Stop Criticizing Big Oil

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has called Chevron CEO sensitive after the company's chief urged him to stop criticizing big oil.

Michael Wirth, Chevron's Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer said in a letter to Biden that his criticism of the oil industry does not help meet facing challenges and stressed the need for cooperation on policy changes.

"He is mildly sensitive," Biden said. "I didn't know they'd get their feelings hurt that easily."

Biden said more refining capacity is needed.

"This idea that they don't have oil to drill and bring up is simply not true," Biden said. "We ought to be able to work something out whereby they're able to increase refining capacity and still not give up on transitioning to renewable energy."

Biden said on Monday that White House team will meet with the CEOs of major oil companies this week to discuss their profits amid significant increases in consumer prices at the gas pump. Biden also said that he will not personally participate in the meeting.

The discussion will occur amid rising energy prices around the world, including in the United States. The average price of a gallon of gas in the US rose to over \$5 a gallon in June, with diesel also at record-high prices above \$6 a gallon.

The Biden administration has said the impact of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine and alleged price gouging by energy firms are responsible for higher fuel prices. Biden on Monday also partially blamed companies not refining enough oil for impacting supply.

However, Russia has denied the accusations, saying the sanctions imposed by the US and its allies, as well as Ukraine's mining the Black Sea, have upended the market and contributed to higher energy, food and fertilizer prices.

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Biden Says No Changes to Planned Trip Amid Israel's Decision to Dissolve Parliament

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the decision to dissolve the Israeli parliament will not affect his planned trip to the country.

When asked whether there any changes to his trip to Israel given the most recent political developments, Biden said, "No."

On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett defended the decision to dissolve parliament as being the right choice after the ruling coalition lost the majority.

A bill will be submitted to the Knesset next week and will trigger a general election, if passed.

Bennett's coalition ally, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, is set to take over as prime minister during the transition period under the power-sharing deal.

The coalition, dubbed Bloc of Change, was formed more than a year ago with only 61 of the 120 seats. It was rendered a minority after two members quit over just as many months last spring, prompting calls for snap elections.

Israel is now heading for a fifth election in four years. The political crisis in the country comes less than a month before Biden is set to come to visit on July 13. Israeli television has cited US Ambassador Thomas Nides as saying that the visit would happen as planned.

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US Air Force Member Arrested in Connection With April Attack on Syria Base - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - A US Air Force service member has been arrested in connection with the April attack on a US military base in northern Syria in which four US military personnel were injured, CNN reported on Tuesday citing a statement by an Air Force spokesperson.

The Air Force service member was taken in custody on June 16 as part of the ongoing investigation and later placed in pretrial confinement, the statement said.

In April, Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve said that the April 7 attack on the US-led coalition base in Syria was caused by explosive charges deliberately placed in the vicinity of the compound.

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Biden Congratulates Gustavo Petro on Victory in Colombia Election - White House

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Tuesday spoke over the telephone with Colombia's President-elect Gustavo Petro and congratulated him on the electoral victory, the White House said in a readout of the conversation.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke with President-elect Gustavo Petro today to congratulate him and Vice President-elect Francia Marquez on their election. President Biden commended the Colombian people for holding free and fair elections and reaffirmed US support for Colombia," the readout said.

Biden expressed his desire to work with Petro to bolster bilateral relations between the United States and Colombia on issues including climate change and health security, the readout said.

The US president also welcomed the opportunity to discuss bilateral security and counternarcotics cooperation, the readout said. The two leaders agreed to have their teams follow up and engage directly on the issue of mutual interest, the readout added. On Monday, Petro declared victory in the Colombian presidential election with 50.51% of the vote over businessman Rodolfo Hernandez. Petro has been described as a leftist and formerly was mayor of the city of Bogota. Petro told his supporters on Sunday that he hopes to develop capitalism and reorient the country's economy away from commodity trading and toward domestic production, dismissing rumors about potentially violating property rights in Colombia.

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Biden Says 'Not Afraid' of Fracture in Pro-Ukraine Alliance

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he is not afraid that the existing disagreements on how to deal with Russia amid the conflict in Ukraine can lead to a fracture in the alliance of countries supporting Kiev. "No, I'm not afraid. But what I do think is there at some point, this is going to be a bit of a waiting game, what the Russians can sustain and what Europe is going to be prepared to sustain. And I think that's one of the things we're going to be speaking in Spain about," Biden said during a press conference.

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Biden Says Plans to Have Conversation With China's Xi, No Time Set Yet For Talks

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he plans to hold discussions with his Chinese counterpart President Xi Jinping but has not yet scheduled the talks. "I plan on having a conversation with President Xi," Biden said when asked if he would speak to Xi before making a decision on tariffs. "We haven't set a time yet."

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US Approves Sale of Missiles to Australia Worth \$94Mln - Defense Security Agency

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The United States has approved a possible sale of a range of missiles requested by Australia in the amount of \$94 million, the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced on Tuesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Australia of AGM-88E2 AARGM E2 Missiles and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$94 million. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale today," the DSCA said in a press release. The sale would include up to 15 AGM-88E2 Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile (AARGM) guidance sections, AARGM control sections, High Speed Anti-Radiation Missiles (HARM) rocket motors, HARM warheads and HARM control sections among other items, the release said. The principal contractors are expected to be Northrop Grumman Information Systems, and Ridgecrest, California, the release said.

The missile provides a supersonic, air-launched tactical missile system that targets ground- and sea-based anti-aircraft systems, the release added.

AARGM is currently deployed with Navy and Marine Corps on the F/A-18C/D Hornet jets, F/A-18E/F Super Hornet jets; Navy and Royal Australian Air Force EA-18G Growler aircraft; and the Italian Air Force's Tornado Electronic Combat aircraft.

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Arizona, Georgia Officials Testify on Trump Pressure to Push Voter Fraud Claims

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - State officials from the US states of Georgia and Arizona testified before the House January 6 select committee on Tuesday about pressure they received from former President Donald Trump to push voter fraud claims in the 2020 presidential election.

"No one provided me, ever, such evidence," the speaker of Arizona's House of Representatives Rusty Bowers said when asked if he was ever provided evidence of voter fraud.

Bowers recalled Trump and his attorney Rudy Giuliani calling him and claiming there was evidence of voter fraud in the results of the presidential election in Arizona. Bowers said he told Trump twice that he would not do anything illegal for him.

Moreover, Bowers said Trump's claim that he told him the election was rigged in Arizona was also false.

Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger during his testimony before the committee said he stood up to do what was right, adding that he just followed the law. He described the type of harassment he faced after he refused to listen to Trump's claims of voter fraud, which included people breaking into his daughter-in-law's home and his wife receiving sexualized text messages.

Raffensperger also said he received messages on his email and cell phone from Trump's radical followers.

Georgia Secretary of State Chief Operating Officer Gabriel Sterling testified that there was no mass voter fraud in Georgia and that it was frustrating to push out Trump's false claims of

election fraud once his followers were sold on the idea. He added that death threats to election officials were getting worse at that point.

The committee's fourth public hearing comes in a seven-part series by the committee meant to showcase testimony and interviews with officials linked to the events of January 6 in an effort to lay out an alleged plot by Trump to overturn the 2020 election results.

Trump and numerous other critics have argued that the work of the US House Select Committee is a show trial intended to score political points before upcoming elections. Critics have also said the probe is biased because US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi refused to admit Republican lawmakers on the panel who may question and challenge its work.

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US Gov't, Meta Settle Lawsuit Over Discriminatory Housing Ads - DOJ

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – The US Department of Justice announced on Tuesday it has reached a settlement with Meta Platforms, Inc. (banned in Russia as an extremist organization) whose officials allowed alleged discriminatory advertising that violated the Fair Housing Act.

"When a company develops and deploys technology that deprives users of housing opportunities based in whole or in part on protected characteristics, it has violated the Fair Housing Act, just as when companies engage in discriminatory advertising using more traditional advertising methods," Damian Williams, US attorney for the Southern District of New York, said. "Because of this ground-breaking lawsuit, Meta will—for the first time—change its ad delivery system to address algorithmic discrimination. But if Meta fails to demonstrate that it has sufficiently changed its delivery system to guard against algorithmic bias, this Office will proceed with the litigation."

According to the DOJ complaint, "Meta uses algorithms in determining which Facebook users receive housing ads, and that those algorithms rely, in part, on characteristics protected under the FHA."

The settlement provisions demand that Meta end use of an advertising tool for housing ads, which, according to the complaint, depends on a discriminatory algorithm to find users who "look like" other users based on FHA-protected characteristics.

The settlement requires that Meta discard the algorithms of the old ad system and create a new system over the next six months that will eliminate racial and other disparities present in its system. Meta will be allowed to implement this new system if the DOJ and the courts sign off on it. But if the new system does not properly address the discriminatory features of the tool that delivers housing ads, the DOJ will end the settlement agreement.

The Justice Department stressed its commitment to holding Meta and other tech firms accountable when they abuse algorithms in ways that unlawfully harm marginalized communities.

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US in Direct Contact With Russia About Americans Detained in Ukraine - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The United States has been in direct contact with Russian authorities about Americans captured in Ukraine, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"We are working hard to learn more about reports of Americans who may be in Russian custody or in the custody of Russian proxy forces. We have been in touch with Russian authorities regarding US citizens who may have been captured while fighting in Ukraine," Price told a briefing, adding that they have also been in touch with Ukrainian authorities as well as the families of the Americans who have been reported missing.

Price said international law requires all those captured on the battlefield be treated humanely. When asked whether they have confirmed information about the captured Americans, Price said that they have no additional details beyond what had been reported in media.

"As I said, we've been in direct contact with Russian authorities, we have not been provided either by Russian authorities or by Russian proxy forces or any other entity with additional details of the whereabouts of these Americans," he added.

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Russia's Record Oil Exports to China Sign of Growing Bilateral Collaboration - White House

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The record exports of Russian oil to China is an example of the two countries' growing collaboration regarding Ukraine, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Tuesday.

On Monday, US corporate media reported that Russia displaced Saudi Arabia as the top oil supplier to China after Moscow increased crude exports to Beijing by 55% from last year.

"This is just a piece of China's willingness to continue to go along with Russia and we're seeing this as a yet another example of a growing collaboration between China and Russia with respect to Ukraine," Kirby said during a press briefing.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the runaway Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops.

The United States and its allies imposed comprehensive sanctions on Russia, including on the supplies of oil to countries in Europe. Russia responded by redirecting energy products' supplies to China and India.

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UN Says \$2.25Bln Flash Appeal for Ukraine 70% Funded

UNITED NATIONS, June 21 (Sputnik) - The international community has increased its contributions to the UN humanitarian appeal for Ukraine, with \$1.58 billion or 70% of the required amount raised, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Tuesday.

"The international community has now stepped up and generously provided 70% of funding to our humanitarian appeal for Ukraine, which stands at \$2.25 billion," Dujarric told a briefing.

The largest donors, as of now, are the United States (36.8%), the European Commission (8.3%), Japan (5.2%), and Canada (4.6%), according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The Ukraine Flash Appeal covers the time frame from March 1-August 31. The requirements will be reviewed for the period beyond August. The flash appeal is supposed to provide life-saving assistance to displaced and non-displaced persons, protect people and civilian infrastructure, and support essential services in areas where hostilities are ongoing.

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US Failure to Connect Detained American to Family Call 'Unfortunate Mistake' - White House

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The failure of the US Embassy in Russia to connect detained US citizen Brittney Griner to her wife Cherelle Griner in a call on Saturday was an "unfortunate mistake," White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday.

"So, this was an unfortunate mistake and the Department of State is working to rectify this as quickly as possible," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing. "From what I understand, a phone interview has been scheduled."

On Monday, Cherelle Griner told US media that Brittney tried to call her 11 times through the embassy over the weekend to celebrate their wedding anniversary and the call was scheduled almost two weeks in advance.

However, there were no personnel at the embassy desk to patch through the calls and the State Department later called to apologize for the situation, she added.

Brittney Griner, a two-time Olympic gold medalist in basketball, was detained at a Moscow airport in February after a police dog alerted officers to a vape cartridge containing cannabis extracts in her luggage.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said on Monday that Brittney Griner violated Russian law and will be prosecuted accordingly.

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UN Delivers 12 Trucks With Humanitarian to Kramatorsk, Sloviansk - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 21 (Sputnik) - The United Nations delivered 12 trucks with humanitarian aid to areas in the cities of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk in the Donbas with critical need for supplies, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"Together with our humanitarian partners, we were able to deliver yesterday 12 trucks of critical supplies to help nearly 64,000 people in the cities of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk. Those are close to the front lines and the government-controlled areas of Donetsk oblast," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

The UN spokesperson noted that the United Nations is particularly about the situation in Sloviansk, which has endured intense shelling - by Ukrainian troops - over the past several weeks.

"Previously home to about 100,000 people or about a quarter of the population now remains: those are mainly elderly who are among the most vulnerable and who are spending their days hiding from the constant bombardment," Dujarric said.

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Biden Working With Partners to Find Overland Ways to Get Grain From Ukraine - White House

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is working with allies and partners around the world to find overland routes of exporting grain from Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"The president is working with leaders around the world to see if there are other overland ways we can do that and he's exploring a range of options," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby added that there are many US partners in Europe who want to see the problem of grain exports from Ukraine to be resolved.

On June 14, Biden said that he has a plan to build temporary silos on Ukraine's borders to export grain.

World leaders and international organizations have been raising concerns over an imminent and large-scale food crisis since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, citing disruptions in supply chains and derailed crops production as well as calling for unblocking of Ukraine's seaports and releasing the grain stuck in warehouses.

Russia has denied blocking seaports and has drawn attention to the fact that Ukraine heavily mined the Black Sea. In addition, Russia has said that it has secured not one but two sea corridors for grain and other exports.

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Russia to Present Document on Ukraine's Anti-Russian Hate Speech to UNSC - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, June 21 (Sputnik) - Moscow's Mission to the UN will distribute an official document about Russophobia and hate speech with quotes by Ukrainian authorities to the members of the Security Council, Russian Envoy Vasily Nebenzia said during the council's meeting on Ukraine on Tuesday.

"We prepared a selection of statements by representatives of the official authorities of Ukraine and also from infamous and well-known popular public figures in the country. We will distribute this shortly as an official Security Council document so that you can really grasp what real hate speech is in contemporary Ukraine and how it's used to justify violence against the Russian-speaking population," Nebenzia said.

Nebenzia cited several cases of hate speech during the meeting, including some which contained violent language.

Apart from the incitement of Russophobia, the ambassador said that the Western leaders do not want to negotiate and only focus on the battlefield. Instead of diplomatic discussions, the Western countries are supplying Ukraine with weapons.

The ambassador named a list of countries, including many European states, saying they are responsible for providing arms to Ukraine that killed people.

"Each of these countries bears direct responsibility for dragging out the Ukrainian crisis and the death both of civilians and Ukrainian soldiers," Nebenzia said.

The Russian envoy concluded his speech by saying that Russia will accomplish the goals of its special military operation.

"Our special military operation will be carried through completely, and its aims will be fully achieved," the envoy said.

The Security Council meeting on Ukraine was the first time since the beginning of this month.

Albania, the president for June and who called for the discussion, invited three briefers, and the topic was hate speech and incitement to violence.

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Canada Reports Increase of Job Vacancies to Record High 957,000 in First Quarter of 2022

OTTAWA, June 21 (Sputnik) - Job vacancies in Canada increased in the first quarter of this year by 24,900 to a record high of 957,500, Statistics Canada said in a report on Tuesday.

"Job vacancies climbed to 957,500 in the first quarter, the highest quarterly number on record," the report said. "As employers continued to face an increasingly tight labor market, vacancies were up 2.7% (+24,900) from the previous peak observed in the fourth quarter of 2021, and up 72.3% (+401,900) from the first quarter of 2020."

Health care and social assistance was the most affected sector with a record 136,800 job vacancies, or 6.5% more than in the previous quarter, followed by construction, with a 7.1% increase for a total of 81,500 job vacancies, the report said.

Manufacturing, and retail trade marked 4,400 job vacancies for a total 87,400 - an increase of 5.3%, the report added.

Since 2016, employment vacancy rates have observed a constant upward tendency, registering a an increase of 5.3% by the end of 2021 and an increase of 5.6% as of the first quarter of 2022, according to the report.

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White House Says Aware Russia Not Guaranteeing Geneva Protections for Captured US Fighters

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The White House is aware of Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov's comments that the Geneva Conventions' protections do not apply to the two captured US citizens fighting in Ukraine, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We've seen the comments by Mr. Peskov with respect to this," Kirby said during a White House briefing. "We're trying to learn more about these two individuals. It's appalling that a public official in Russia would even suggest the death penalty for two Americans citizens that were in Ukraine."

On Monday, Peskov said in an interview that the two captured US citizens - military veterans Alexander Drueke and Andy Huynh - were working as mercenaries and fighting illegally in Ukraine and will be held accountable for any crimes they may have committed.

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States Must Work Together to Resume Russia-Ukraine Peace Talks - Chinese Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, June 21 (Sputnik) - The international community should cooperate on creating conditions for resumption of Ukraine-Russia peace talks, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on Tuesday.

"The international community should work together to deescalate the situation, put out the fire, facilitate peace talks thus creating conditions for the parties to resume peace negotiations and achieve the ceasefire without further delay," Zhang said.

The Chinese diplomat emphasized that sending more weapons to Ukraine will only will worsen the ongoing conflict and deepen the humanitarian crisis in the country.

Zhang also called on governments to strengthen oversight of social media platforms to prevent spread of hate speech.

Last week, Davyd Arakhamia, Ukraine's negotiator at the now stalled peace talks with Russia, described Kiev's negotiating position as being weak. He noted that despite the fact negotiations have been frozen, the Ukrainian delegation is holding telephone talks with the Russian delegation once or twice a week.

Arakhamia also said Ukraine has been losing up to 1,000 soldiers killed or wounded every day in the Donbas region where the Russian forces are currently advancing. Ukraine has already recruited 1 million people to fight and has the capacity to recruit 2 million more.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks from Ukrainian troops. The two countries have since held several rounds of peace talks but failed to reach an agreement.

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World Bank Chief Says Worried About Impact of Natural Gas Shortage on Fertilizer Markets

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - World Bank Group President David Malpass said on Tuesday that he is worried about the impact the shortage of natural gas will have on fertilizer markets immediately and next year.

"The big jump in energy price and the shortage of natural gas as Europe buys up the world's supply of divertible natural gas, that's putting a giant bind on the fertilizer markets worldwide," Malpass said during a panel discussion about the Ukraine crisis. "So I'm worried about next year as well as the immediate issue of the crises."

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Ukraine Will Need More Grain Storage if UN-Led Efforts Fail to Free Exports - USAID Chief

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Ukraine will need more storage facilities for grain if the United Nations-led efforts to broker an agreement to allow exports from ports in the Black Sea fail, USAID Administrator Samantha Power said on Tuesday.

"We can't give up actually on what the [United Nations] Secretary General is doing now, which is trying to actually create a pathway for corridors to move the harvests that had been gathered already out of Ukraine," Power said during remarks at the World Bank. "If it doesn't happen, we are going to need more storage facilities."

Power said the international community needs to come up with a solution on this matter to ensure farmers have somewhere to store their next harvest.

On June 14, US President Joe Biden said that he has a plan to build temporary silos on Ukraine's borders to export grain.

World leaders and international organizations have been raising concerns over an imminent and large-scale food crisis since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, citing disruptions in supply chains and derailed crops production as well as calling for unblocking of Ukraine's seaports and releasing the grain stuck in warehouses.

Russia has denied blocking seaports and has drawn attention to the the fact that Ukraine heavily mined the Black Sea. In addition, Russia has said that it has secured not one but two sea corridors for grain and other exports.

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UPDATE: US Attorney General Makes Unannounced Visit to Ukraine - Justice Dept.

(Updates with attribution in headline, lede and additional details in paras 2-6)

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - US Attorney General Merrick Garland is making an unannounced visit to Ukraine, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

Garland met with Ukrainian Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova to discuss efforts to help identify and prosecute individuals involved in war crimes in Ukraine, the Justice Department said in a press release.

During the meeting, Garland announced the launch of a War Crime Accountability Team to strengthen the Justice Department in finding and holding accountable those who committed war crimes in Ukraine, the release said.

"There is no hiding place for war criminals. The US Justice Department will pursue every avenue of accountability for those who commit war crimes and other atrocities in Ukraine," the release cited Garland as saying.

Garland also appointed Eli Rosenbaum to be the Counselor for War Crimes Accountability to coordinate efforts across the Justice Department and the federal government to hold accountable those individuals responsible for war crimes in Ukraine. Rosenbaum previously served in the Justice Department and was responsible for identifying, denaturalizing, and deporting Nazi war criminals, according to the press release.

The US Attorney General said the Justice Department will deploy two expert attorneys to support the KleptoCapture Task Force that was launched in March to trace and seize assets of Russian businessman in response to Moscow's special military operation in Ukraine, the release said.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. Russia has said the goal of the special military operation is to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine.

Last week, US President Joe Biden told reporters that it is not likely he will visit Ukraine during his upcoming trip to Europe.

Biden will visit Germany and Spain from June 25-28 for the Group of Seven (G7)and NATO summits. The NATO summit will take place in Madrid, Spain, on June 28.subject:

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Ukraine Spends Some \$6Bln Per Month to Fund Government During Conflict - USAID Chief

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Ukraine spends an estimated \$6 billion a month to fund government operations during the ongoing conflict, USAID Administrator Samantha Power said on Tuesday.

"The burn rate for this government having to manage this war is at last estimate I think somewhere between five and \$6 billion a month," Power said during remarks at the World Bank. The United States will provide Ukraine \$7.5 billion to support its government budget, but that will not be enough, Power said.

President Joe Biden signed a new \$40 billion Ukraine aid bill into law in late May. It authorizes roughly \$20 billion for the Pentagon to spend on security assistance for Ukraine, including the provision of military equipment. The bill will also provide almost \$9 billion in economic assistance, over \$4 billion in humanitarian aid and another \$4 billion in foreign military financing through the State Department.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said the operation aims to "protect people subjected to genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years." As of March 25, the Russian armed forces completed the main tasks of the first stage, significantly reducing the combat potential of Ukraine. Western nations have imposed numerous sanctions on Russia.

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Police Could Have Stopped Uvalde School Shooting Gunman Within 3 Minutes - DPS Chief

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - Local authorities responding to the Uvalde school shooting last month could have stopped the gunman within three minutes, Texas Department of Public Safety Director Steven McCraw said on Tuesday.

On May 24, an 18-year-old gunman opened fire inside Robb Elementary School, killing 19 students and two teachers.

"Three minutes after the subject entered the west building, there was a sufficient number of armed officers wearing body armor to isolate, distract and neutralize the subject," McCraw said during a hearing before the Texas Senate Committee.

McCraw said there's compelling evidence showing that the law enforcement response to the attack at Robb Elementary School was an abject failure and antithetical to everything learned over the last two decades since the Columbine school shooting.

The only thing stopping a hallway of dedicated officers from entering the school classrooms was the on-scene commander who "decided to place the lives of officers before the lives of children," McCraw said.

The preliminary results of the probe into the incident revealed there was no police officer at the school readily available to engage the gunman, who walked into the school unobstructed. In addition, law enforcement took nearly an hour to prepare to enter the school to engage the shooter.

The Uvalde massacre was the 27th school shooting in the United States in 2022 and so far, there have been 214 mass shootings in America since the beginning of the year, according to Gun Violence Archive data.

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Twitter Board of Directors Unanimously Endorse Elon Musk Takeover - SEC Filing

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The Twitter Board of Directors unanimously endorsed the takeover of the social media company by entrepreneur Elon Musk, according to a filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) released Tuesday.

The Board of Directors determined that the merger agreement is advisable, fair and within the best interests of Twitter and its stockholders, a preliminary proxy statement to stockholders included in the filing said. The Twitter executives adopted and approved the merger agreement as well, the statement said.

The Board of Directors also recommended that stockholders vote in favor of the merger agreement.

In April, Musk reached an acquisition agreement with Twitter at \$54.20 per share in a transaction valued at approximately \$44 billion. However, the billionaire entrepreneur last month accused Twitter's management of unwillingness to provide data on the number of spam and fake accounts on the platform, resulting in concerns about the possible termination of the agreement and a 3.92% decline in the company's value.

Musk said later in May that the deal was put on hold due to the spam and fake account problem, prompting the company's shares to crumble by 20%.

On Tuesday, Musk said at the Qatar Economic Forum that there are still unresolved issues holding back his acquisition of Twitter. Shareholders still have to vote in favor of the agreement, Musk said, adding that he is also still waiting on data concerning spam and fake accounts. Musk nevertheless expressed optimism about the deal moving forward and implementing his plans to bolster free speech and inclusiveness on the social media platform. Musk also said that he hopes to garner 80% of the North American population and 50% of the world population as Twitter users.

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US Supreme Court Rules Against State Law Excluding Religious Schools From Tuition Program

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Tuesday struck down a tuition assistance program from the state of Maine that excluded religious schools from receiving funding and ruled that the restriction violates the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

"Maine's 'nonsectarian' requirement for its otherwise generally available tuition assistance payments violates the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment. Regardless of how the benefit and restriction are described, the program operates to identify and exclude otherwise eligible schools on the basis of their religious exercise," Chief Justice John Roberts said in the court's written opinion.

The First Amendment clauses on religion forbid the US government from making any law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise of religion.

The case involves a Maine program allowing parents in school districts without secondary schools to decide whether to send their children to public or private schools. Under the program, the school district transferred payments to the chosen school to offset the tuition costs, but only so long as the school qualified as "nonsectarian."

The ruling does not require Maine to fund religious education, Roberts also said in the written opinion. US states are not required to subsidize private education, but once a state decides to do so, it cannot disqualify some private schools solely because they are religious, Roberts said. The dissenting opinion, written by Justice Stephen Breyer, said the majority's decision focuses too much on protecting the free exercise of religion and not enough on avoiding the establishment of religion by the state. States have a degree of legislative leeway to act as Maine did under the program, Breyer said.

However, Roberts said a state's anti-establishment interest does not justify exclusion of community members from otherwise generally available public benefit due to their religious exercise. A neutral benefit program in which public funds flow to religious organizations through the independent choice of private benefit recipients does not violate the First Amendment, he added.

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US State Dept. Says Ukraine Does Not Use Anti-Personnel Landmines

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – Ukraine does not use anti-personnel landmines, and the United States has never supplied Kiev with any landmines that are not compliant with the Ottawa Convention, US Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Stanley Brown said on Tuesday.

"Ukraine is actually a party to the Ottawa Convention and cannot use landmines that do not comply with convention themselves. So, in itself, Ukraine is not using landmines and we have not provided landmines to Ukraine that aren't compliant with the Ottawa Convention," Brown told a press briefing, when asked whether Ukraine uses anti-personnel landmines.

Earlier in the day, the Biden administration announced that the United States will not develop, produce, or acquire anti-personnel landmines. It will not export or transfer APL, "except when

necessary for activities related to mine detection or removal, and for the purpose of destruction," the White House said.

Since the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in February, the United States has been the main provider of military assistance and equipment to Ukraine, committing about \$6.3 billion in total. The equipment sent to the country includes 1,400 Stinger anti-aircraft systems, 6,500 Javelin anti-armor systems, 700 Switchblade drones, 126 155mm howitzers among others.

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US Begins Enforcement of Ban on Imports From China's Xinjiang - Blinken

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – The United States has started implementing the regulations that ban imports of goods from China's Xinjiang, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"Starting today, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will begin to implement the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act's provisions to prohibit imports made by forced labor into the United States of products made in Xinjiang," Blinken said.

The bill, signed by President Joe Biden in December 2021, underscores Washington's commitment to combating forced labor globally, including in Xinjiang, he added.

Blinken accused authorities in Xinjiang of genocide and crimes against humanity.

"We have taken concrete measures to promote accountability in Xinjiang, including visa restrictions, financial sanctions under Global Magnitsky, export controls, Withhold Release Orders and import restrictions, as well as the release of a multi-agency business advisory on Xinjiang to help U.S. companies avoid commerce that facilitates or benefits from human rights abuses, including forced labor," Blinken said.

He reaffirmed that combating forced labor and human rights abuses in China and around the world is a US priority, he added.

The United States has repeatedly accused Beijing of arbitrarily imprisoning members of Muslim minority groups in a system of extrajudicial mass internment camps, where people are reportedly forced to produce textiles, electronics, food products, shoes, tea, and handicrafts. Beijing, in turn, has consistently denied the existence of "re-education camps," insisting that the country fully complies with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

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US Successfully Tests Diamond Shield Management System in Guam War Games - Lockheed Martin

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The US Indo-Pacific Command successfully operated a new Diamond Shield battle management system linked to Aegis missile and air defense virtualized operations in the Valiant Shield military exercises on and around Guam, Lockheed Martin said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Lockheed Martin paired its Diamond Shield battle management system with four Virtualized Aegis Weapon System (VAWS) nodes deployed across hundreds of miles to successfully demonstrate multi-domain operations during a recent US military exercise," the release said. During the 12-day event in Guam and other sites in the Pacific, Lockheed Martin cooperated with the Indo-Pacific Command in operating artificial intelligence to accelerate the rate of decision-making to seconds or minutes instead of hours, the release also said.

"The exercise, called Valiant Shield 2022, is a biennial training activity involving thousands of US. military personnel and more than 200 ships, aircraft and ground vehicles," the release added.

The Diamond Shield-VAWS linkup operated at strategic, operational and tactical levels of missions across air, land, sea and space during the exercise, according to the release.

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State Dept. Confirms Second US Citizen Died in Ukraine - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - A US State Department spokesperson on Tuesday confirmed to Sputnik the death of a second US citizen Stephen Zabielski in Ukraine amid Russia's special military operation there.

"We can confirm the death of US citizen Stephen Zabielski in Ukraine. We have been in touch with the family and have provided all possible consular assistance," the spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik.

According to Zabielski's obituary, he was killed on May 15 while engaging in combat operations in Ukraine. The obituary was published on June 1 but was not reported on until Monday by US corporate media.

US Marine Corps veteran Willy Joseph Cancel, who died in April, was the first confirmed mercenary from the United States to be killed fighting in Ukraine.

On Friday, media reported that a third US citizen has gone missing in Ukraine and it is believed that he is former Marine Corps service member Grady Kurpasi.

US citizens Alexander Drueke, 39, and Andy Huynh, 27, were captured by Russian forces near Kharkiv last week. The two had been identified as being a US Army veteran and a US Marine Corps veteran, respectively.

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Biden to Nominate First Native American as US Treasurer - White House

WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) – President Joe Biden will nominate Marilynn Malerba as US Treasurer, making her the first Native American to hold the position, the White House said on Tuesday.

"Malerba is the Chief of the Mohegan Tribe, a lifetime appointment made by the Tribe's Council of Elders. Prior to becoming chief, she served as chairwoman of the Mohegan Tribal Council, and served in Tribal Government as Executive Director of Health and Human Services," the White House said in a statement. "Preceding her work for the Mohegan Tribe, Chief Malerba had a lengthy career as a registered nurse, ultimately serving as the Director of Cardiology and Pulmonary Services at Lawrence & Memorial Hospital."

Malerba is a member of the Treasury Tribal Advisory Committee, a seven-member committee which advises the Secretary of the Treasury on issues related to taxing Native Americans, training field agents of the Internal Revenue Service, and developing training and technical assistance to Native American financial officers.

The Treasurer of the United States is responsible for the smooth running of the US Mint, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, Fort Knox, and is a key liaison with the Federal Reserve. Malerba will also act as senior advisor to the Secretary of the Treasury focused on community development and public engagement.

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US Designates New Mobile Radar to Track Hypersonic Missiles, Drones - Northrop Grumman
WASHINGTON, June 21 (Sputnik) - The US government has designated a new rapidly mobile and movable radar capable of closely tracking hypersonic weapons, unmanned aerial vehicles, fifth generation combat aircraft and other threats, Northrop Grumman announced in a press release on Tuesday.

"Northrop Grumman's long-range radar, an advanced digital radar available in the market today, has been officially recognized by the US government as the AN/TPY-5(V)1 making it the newest multi-mission air-surveillance radar available to the US military and its international partners," the release said.

"The AN/TPY-5(V)1 provides enhanced surveillance and a robust multifunction capability," Northrop Grumman Vice President Mike Meaney said. "This S-band system features advanced electronic protection combined with a high degree of mobility that will help ensure survivability in today's complex battlespace."

The new system is capable of facing the challenges of fifth-generation fighters, hypersonic weapons, unmanned systems and ballistic missiles, the release said.

"AN/TPY-5(V)1's size and form factor have been optimized for expeditionary operation on a modern, global battlefield, making its intrinsic capability to self-deploy, emplace and displace in minutes - a key discriminator compared to other systems," the release added.

The radar's advanced digital AESA architecture and command and control integration have been combined to enable protection and situational understanding for warfighters, according to the release.

